



Weekly wrap up

Friday, August 26, 2005

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Letter to the Editor: DCS Took My Kids

'These people changed my life...'

(Note: This letter, penned by a Perry County woman, ran in her local newspaper this month.)

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In a recent issue of the *Buffalo River Review*, I read a letter from someone about people being “wronged” by DCS. They were asking them to write to a number of addresses and tell their story. But what about those of us who were “righted” by DCS? Everyone always tells bad things about these men and women have the power to come in and tell what we’ve done wrong, and if the situation is bad enough, remove our children from their home.

This happened to me. They came in and took my girls.

I was mad. Naturally, I blamed them. But I accepted it was no one’s fault but mine. I was at fault. I lost my kids. I was the one with the problem, and I had to fix it. I was a meth addict.

I have now been clean 39 weeks. I am also working with Roy Rogers of the Perry County Sheriff’s Department, wanting to start a program against meth. I want to call it “Choose Life, Not Meth.”

I would not be here today if it wasn’t for **Susan Franks** and **Debra Fitton** with DCS. I also had help from an in-home drug counselor named **Jack Smith** from Hohenwald. He contracts through DCS. These people changed my life. I had a problem. I caused this, and I fixed it. I got my girls home. I wonder when someone says they were “wronged” by DCS, if it’s just because their cover was blown, their “secrets” came out. They had to stop what they were doing that was wrong or lose their kids. DCS cannot just draw a name out of hat and take those kids. They must have a justifiable reason. They are there to make sure we love our children, that they are not beaten, starved to death or wronged in any way.

Once upon a time, departments like Children's Services were not needed. People used to have better morals and better standards. Once upon a time, drugs were not an issue. Sexual abuse was not an issue. People used to value their children as the gift they are. I'm not trying to ruffle anyone's feathers: I am just letting people know that even though most people say they have been wronged by DCS, there are also success stories like mine. If not for Children's Services, I might be in jail like a lot of people I know, or maybe even dead. Meth is a bad word. I can't honestly say I could give it up and stayed away without the help of Susan, Debra and Jack. To these people all affiliated with DCS, I say thank you. I am glad you were there for me.

I can now say, honestly, I am meth free and truly happy.

Angie Burcham

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The Future of TNKids

*Price: DCS Prepares to Trade Up For
New Model That Will Pass Muster With Feds*

Most, if not all, of you are aware that our TNKids system is intended to meet the federal requirements for a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System -- or "SACWIS". A SACWIS must meet those federal requirements and support DCS policy and practice to be considered federally compliant. The department is now at a point where we must decide to either continue development of TNKids or take another approach in order to reach SACWIS compliance.

Four particular things have caused us to propose another approach -- a new system, in other words.

The first is that TNKids, which was developed to support a child-focused practice model, would have to be re-written to support the department's new family-focused practice model.

Second, our case managers must have access to the system when away from the office. To this end, TNKids needs to be web-enabled and support wireless capabilities.

Third, the TNKids technical environment is becoming obsolete.

Finally, we need a system that is much more user-friendly.

So, Commissioner Viola Miller asked me to plan and coordinate a number of business process mapping sessions, which are underway. These facilitated sessions with business area experts from across the state are intended to document our processes so that everyone is in agreement on how we will do business.

Some of you have been or may be asked to participate in this. Having documented business processes that everyone agrees upon will provide a foundation for our future SACWIS activity.

Concurrently, OIS is in the process of writing and submitting state and federal planning documents regarding our SACWIS project and proposed change of approach.

These documents must be reviewed and approved before we proceed with any further SACWIS work, TNKids or otherwise.

Though we will be developing a new system, it is our intention to implement one more major TNKids release, which is tentatively scheduled for implementation in the first quarter of 2006. Then we will be in a maintenance mode on TNKids, making only those changes that the DCS Core Leadership Team agrees must be made.

Web applications will be developed to support any new, mission-critical functions. We will continue to use TNKids until a new system is implemented. We are starting to develop timelines for the new SACWIS project, and we will communicate those as they are firmed up.

Michael A. Price, Sr.
Executive Director
Office of Information Systems

Professional Development Seminars

Commissioner Miller is fond of saying these days that, "We have done the impossible, now it is time for the possible." Specifically she is talking about the amazing reduction in CPS past-due cases, but in a broader sense she is talking about the amazing amount of change the department has experienced in the last eighteen months -- whether it is rightsizing the regions, securing the second round of raises, or a CFTM process poised to achieve great outcomes for families and children.

You should all be proud of the work you have accomplished.

When I hear her say, "now it is time for the possible" what I hear is how do we all work together to build on our strengths to demonstrate high-quality casework day in and day out. We know the quality is

there. How do we acknowledge it? Replicate it? Provide it consistently? What we know is we cannot do it alone.

So beginning in late September, the commissioner and a few key staff are going to begin conducting Professional Development Seminars focusing initially with Team Coordinators. The goal is to develop a supervisory mentoring and professional development model that is based on real work situations, successful efforts to master supervisory skills, and the strategies used on the road to becoming a reflective supervisor.

As we move forward in our efforts to achieve consistent, high quality services to families and children, I would love to hear examples from you where a supervisor really made a difference in your professional development. One of my early profound professional development experiences involved a supervisor who believed in me more than I believed in myself, always challenged me to do more than I thought I could do, but was there to listen and reflect with me as I broke new ground. Think about and share with us what you believe are important steps along the pathway of professional development. You will hear more as we move into the fall and complete our first Professional Development Seminars.

-- Bonnie Hommrich
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For Those Who Haven't Read The Book

The below article was forwarded to me by Sue Burfield. She attended my *Who Moved My Cheese* workshop and thought I might be interested. Because change occurs so often within our department and affects everybody, I thought it would be appropriate to include this article by Harvey Mackay.

Enjoy,
Tom Riche

Find some new cheese or risk extinction

By Harvey Mackay

Several recent columns have stressed the importance of adaptability in today's ever-changing business environment. Not surprisingly, I've been told by more than one friend to check out Spencer Johnson's bestseller, *Who Moved My Cheese?* I have been a fan of Spencer Johnson, and a close friend of his sometime co-author Ken Blanchard, ever since they published their masterpiece, *The One-Minute Manager*.

I picked up a copy of *Who Moved My Cheese?* and liked it so much I read it twice. Like all of Spencer Johnson's books, this latest one is deceptively simple. It is a charming parable that takes only an hour to read. You read it, think about it, mull it over and decide to read it again. The second reading is then better than the first. This kind of simplicity hides profound insights.

The insights in *Who Moved My Cheese?* are valid. The main one is that no matter who you are, you don't like change. Oh, some of us cope with it fairly well, but the truth remains that we all wish we didn't have to undergo change.

We all find the status quo acceptable, provided we have our basic necessities met and have whatever else we value most in life. It could be a good job, a fulfilling relationship, enough money, the right possessions, good health or a satisfying spiritual or religious life. Some people are fortunate and have all of these things.

In being complacent, we're like the four characters at the beginning of *Who Moved My Cheese?* We're like Sniff and Scurry, the two mice in the maze. And we're also like Hem and Haw, the two human characters in the story who are only the size of the mice and are called little people.

When their story begins, all four of these characters are happy. Every day, they know where to go in the maze to get their cheese. Life is easy. Life is fulfilling. They are all on cloud nine, all on Easy Street. All they have to do each day is get up whenever they like and go to Cheese Station C and everything they need is right there, in whatever quantity they want.

Then one day they go to Cheese Station C and things are kaput. Their seemingly endless supply of cheese is gone.

The mice Sniff and Scurry react quickly and instinctively. Sniff takes a big whiff of the air and nods in one direction. Then he and Scurry pull on the running shoes they have always carried around their necks for just such an emergency and run off into the maze in the direction Sniff indicated. They know they have to find a new supply of cheese.

Not so for Hem and Haw. They continue their old routine. Each day they go to Cheese Station C only to find their cheese has been moved. They are afraid to venture forth in the maze and find a new source of cheese. Hem complains and complains. Finally Haw asks him where they put their running shoes. It takes forever to find them because they had put everything away, thinking they were set for life.

When Haw finds his running shoes and starts to put them on, Hem says, "You're not really going out into the maze again, are you? Why don't you just wait here with me until they put the cheese back?"

"Because, you just don't get it," Haw says. "I didn't want to see it either, but now I realize they're never going to put yesterday's cheese back. It's time to find new cheese."

Haw doesn't want to go out into the maze either, but he knows he must. He has to overcome his fears and conquer his doubts. He wants to help Hem, so he writes on the wall the first of his many insights: "IF YOU DO NOT CHANGE, YOU CAN BECOME EXTINCT."

Haw sets off in the maze and leaves a trail of messages for Hem to follow, messages like the first insight above. They are "The Handwriting on the Wall."

Haw, eventually, after much trial and error, finds new cheese. Not only is the cheese he finds new, it is better than the old cheese. Like Sniff and Scurry, Hem has learned to keep things simple and to move with the cheese.

Mackay's Moral: Adapt, don't hem and haw.

Culture Fest Becomes Recruitment Bonanza

The Department of Children's Services participated in the Johnson City UMOJA Festival on Saturday, August 13, in an effort to provide information and recruit minority foster parents. This annual, unique African-American cultural festival included storytelling, verbal art traditions, seminars, and performances in partnership with local community organizations and East Tennessee State University. There were numerous booths set up for arts and crafts, informational purposes and refreshments.

The department's booth was organized by the Recruitment and Foster Parent Support Team in the Northeast Region. In addition to providing information on fostering and adopting, a "make-a-bracelet" craft was provided as a free activity for the children present at the festival.

We would like to thank the following volunteers for assisting with this event: Vanessa Addington, Foster Parent Support; Christi Vaughn, Foster Parent Support; Christina Butler, Recruitment; Stephanie Richardson, Foster Parent Support; Susan Jordan, Resource; and Kim Stephens; Home County Case Manager.

WWU: So, was it a success?

Yes! We got a page full of names of interested folks (all African American, one of our target minorities)! We have mailed them our initial inquiry packet & our wonderful follow-up caller, LouAnn Moore, will contact them soon to answer any of their questions or concerns. It was definitely worth the effort!

-- Vanessa Addington